

National news

Traveller camp drives away the bailiffs

Steven Morris

The bailiffs had arrived shortly after first light with orders to evict the group of travellers from land they had been living on for the last three years.

But by yesterday afternoon, the officials had retreated, driven back by burning barricades, trenches filled with flaming rubbish and a human chain which refused to budge.

Day one of "the Battle of Bulkington" ended with the travellers claiming victory over Nuneaton and Bedworth council, which insists they must move.

The travellers bought the plot of land in the north Warwickshire village of Bulkington from a farmer almost three years ago, planning to turn it into a model site complete with its own village green.

Around 20 families moved in but planning permission for a private travellers' site was refused. Nevertheless, buildings, fences and roads began to appear on the land, which is in the green belt.

More than a year ago the travellers argued their case in the high court. Though they lost they still refused to give up their homes, prompting the council to call in the bailiffs.

But when they arrived the travellers were ready. They set on fire two caravans and an old van which they had parked at the entrance to the site. They also torched rubbish piled into two metre-wide trenches which had been dug around the site. Around 40 men formed a human chain outside the site.

A four-hour standoff, observed by 40 police officers and a number of firefighters, followed before the bailiffs were called off.

The travellers' spokesman, John Lee, said: "I think we can claim a victory. There is no way we were letting them in. If they had got past us on the gate, they would have been confronted by the women and children. All we want is to protect our homes. Surely the council can work



Travellers patrol the edge of Bulkington Fields caravan site yesterday. Photograph: Darren Staples/Reuters

with us to either find us another site or to leave us in peace at this one? We are not asking anyone for money, just for permission to live as we want to."

Cliff Podona, of the National Travellers' Group, said: "These people are living on land that

is rightfully theirs and will do everything they can to avoid eviction. There are women, children and pensioners on the site who are terrified about what is going on. There are over 40 children enrolled at the local school who will have

their education disrupted if they are made to leave."

But the council said it would continue to try to remove the travellers. Spokesman Tim Norton said the council had received information that the travellers intended to resist

the eviction "utilising considerable force". He added: "Having evaluated the situation we decided that the eviction should not proceed today. The council remains committed to ending the unlawful development of the gypsy site."